

# Foothill water wells checked for chemicals

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Health authorities have shut down two wells in the Arroyo Seco close to the Jet Propulsion Lab where water has been found to contain excessive traces of a suspected cancer-causing chemical.

As of Friday, 31 wells were shut down in the San Gabriel Valley, from Covina to Pasadena — 13 of them this week— because the industrial cleaning solvent, trichloroethylene, known as TCE, was found in levels exceeding five parts per billion.

The five ppb limit was set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and is being enforced by the State Department of Health Services.

Although the Arroyo Seco forms the eastern boundary for

the Crescenta-Canada Valley, no dangerous TCE contamination has been found in foothills water company wells thus far.

City of Pasadena assistant water manager Bill Bangham said Friday that TCE at 13 ppb was found at the Arroyo well, near the Windsor Avenue parking lot for JPL, January 10. Succeeding readings showed that on January 12, there was 27 ppb, on January 15 3.5 ppb and on January 16 5.6 ppb.

Bangham said this well had the highest level of TCE of any in Pasadena. The Arroyo well had serviced parts of Altadena and Pasadena and JPL. After trying to flush the well out earlier this week to see if the TCE could be removed, without success, the well has been shut down.

On Friday, the second Arroyo Seco well shut down serving a

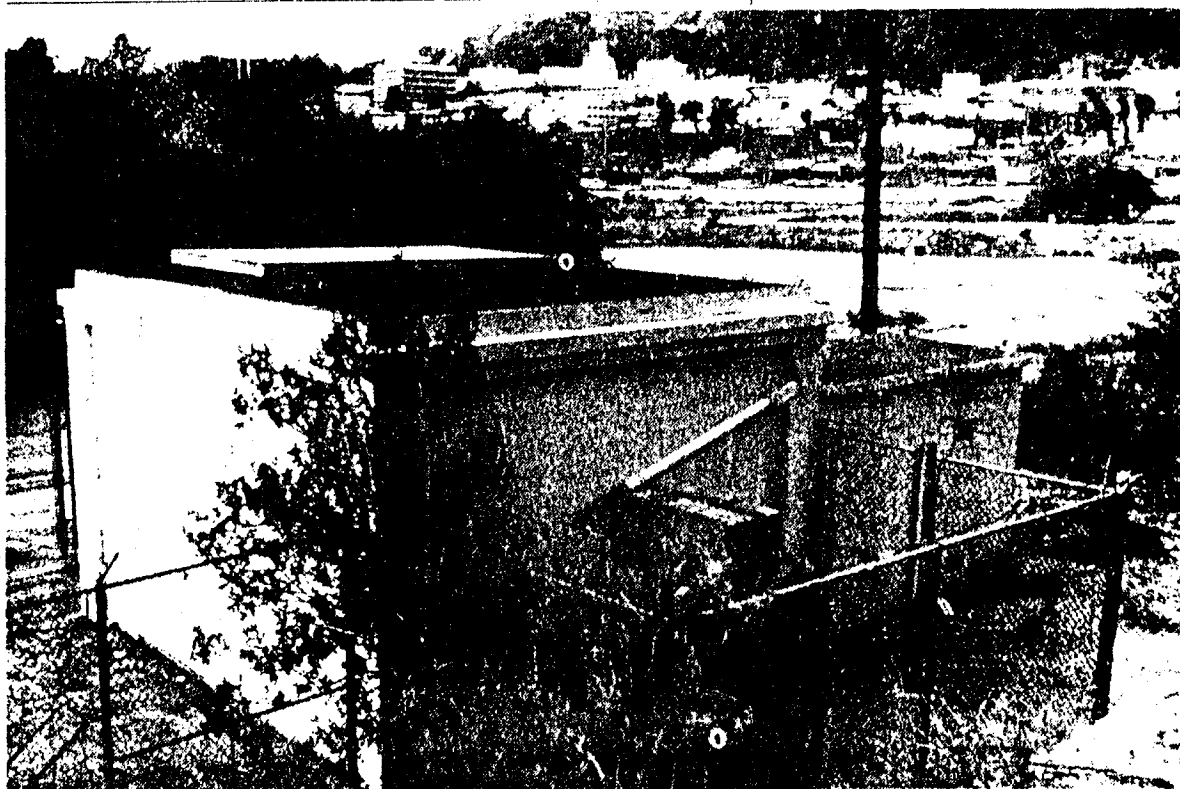
part of Altadena in a system owned by the Lincoln Avenue Water Co., has had readings of 10.1 ppb and 6.1 ppb.

TCE is used in dry cleaning and as a solvent for such purposes as cleaning aircraft engines. With the help of studies done on rats, the government has set 5 ppb as the level at which wells must be shut down.

Of about 250 wells analyzed by health authorities in the San Gabriel area, about 55 percent have shown no detectable levels of TCE. Another 35 percent show levels well below 5 ppb and the remaining 10 percent of the wells have been closed. Source of the TCE is unknown.

The two Arroyo wells tap water in the vast underground Raymond Basin, which extends from Pasadena beneath La Canada Flintridge in a line with the San Rafael Hills on the south

see page 11



This structure on Windsor Avenue, housing a well with several pumps, is one of two in the Arroyo Seco that has been closed down after excessive amounts of a suspected cancer-causing chemical were found. Yesterday, the number of San Gabriel

Valley and Pasadena water wells closed down climbed to 31. Health authorities are playing detectives trying to find the source of the contaminant, trichloroethylene (TCE). In background, is the Jet Propulsion Lab and La Canada Flintridge.

# Foothills water wells checked for chemicals

from page 10

and along the San Gabriels to Pickens Canyon on the north, according to state watermaster maps. West and south of that is the separate Verdugo Basin.

Al Harrell of the Valley Water Co. in La Canada says that of their four wells, only one is operating on a small scale. On his own initiative, he had that water tested and it showed only a trace of TCE, or 1 ppb, way under the EPA regulation, he said.

Harrell called TCE an exotic chemical, one that ordinarily was not even considered for testing. Harrell also pointed out that the 800 acre feet that is pumped by Valley is diluted with two-thirds imported Metropolitan Water District water before delivery to customers.

Doug Caister of La Canada Irrigation Co. said Friday that their wells are only used in the summer during peak demand periods. However, he said he intended to start up one of them next week and have the water tested for TCE.

Caister said he found it disturbing that there seemed to be so much inconsistency in the results of the testing that is being done in the San Gabriel Valley. "A level will be up one day— and then down the next, from the same well." He said he understood that TCE does not totally mix with water, and maybe that contributed to the inconsistencies.

Bill Bangham and others of the water district managers commented on the infinitesimal amount a part per billion really is. Bangham compared it to "one drop of vermouth in 500 barrels of gin."

Crescenta Valley County Water District had just received the results of a sampling taken at well No. 14, at Sycamore and La Crescenta Avenues, on Friday. It showed 0.9 ppb, really only a trace. And again that well water is mixed with imported state and Colorado River water.

Glendale Water Services Director Steve Meyerhofer said he had checked with both state and regional water quality control officials as well as state health authorities this week, and was told no testing of Glendale well water would be required at this time.

At this time of year, Meyerhofer pointed out, more than 90 percent of the city's water is purchased from MWD— and that is completely free from TCE contamination. "We are complying in every respect with all state and EPA requirements," he said.

Meyerhofer said he was told that health authorities' main concern at this time was the San Gabriel Valley, completing testing of both wells and tapwater there where TCE has been found. He was told that later, the testing would continue west into the Verdugo, San Fernando and on to Ventura Basin areas.

"I've heard that there are ap-

proximately 122 other types of possible new contaminants that are being tested by the EPA and on which there may be future rulings," Meyerhofer said.

Beverly Powell of the state Health Services Department said Friday that Monday "We'll start doing resampling of several of the San Gabriel Valley wells and start checking tapwater."

Health officials say it is unlikely people who have used the contaminated well have been in any danger of absorbing harmful concentrations, because water used by homes is a blend of several water sources.

However, on Friday, both Sparkletts and Arrowhead spokesmen said they were getting dozens of new orders for bottled water. And water officials admitted they were exhausted from just answering their telephones.

It is expected a policy report on the situation will be made by State Health Department very soon. Mark Lappe, director of the department's hazard alert unit, said, "These are the highest levels of TCE ever detected, anywhere. We intend to reconfirm the importance of the steps (well closures) that have been taken."